

A FLAT CLASSROOM PROJECT ON ADVERTISING

USING WIKI TECHNOLOGY

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1. Introduction

In this report I will present an innovative project which is cooperative, authentic and interdisciplinary. The students will write a collaborative report using a wiki. They will work together with students from around the world to produce an article about a subtopic of advertisement, improving both their electronic literacy and their intercultural communicative competence along the way.

The project presented here is based on the concept of the “Flat Classroom Projects” co-founded by Vicki Davis (Westwood Schools, USA) and Julie Lindsay (Beijing International School, China) in 2006. Their goal was to join classrooms together in a collaborative task, thus lowering or ‘flattening’ the classroom walls.

2. Wiki overview

Although the first wiki was set up as early as 1994, they have become popular only recently. Therefore I want to give a brief introduction to the concept of wikis.

A wiki is a web-based software that allows viewers to edit pages in their browser. In effect, it is a platform for co-operative work on (hyper-)texts. Additionally, every page has a discussion page that works like a forum in which page-related issues can be discussed. Another vital feature is the History page. It shows every edit, can be used to revert to previous versions or to track participation. For this project I propose the use of www.wikispaces.com as a host.

Advantages of utilizing a wiki in the classroom will be explained in the section “Didactical/Methodological Considerations”.

3. Conditions

3.1 The classes, place, time and technical equipment

The hypothetical class has 24 students and is in grade 11 “Leistungskurs” at a Gymnasium in Dresden, Germany. Through an internet forum the teacher of the Dresden class connected with four other teachers from around the world who were interested in this global teaching experiment. The other four participating classes are from France, Poland, India and South Africa. The students are more or less of the same age and have similar levels of proficiency in English.

All classes have access to a computer lab or have computers available for every student. The students may work at home additionally (sick students are encouraged to follow their group's progress from home).

The project will run for 5 weeks, with a double lesson (90 min) per week. Due to differing time zones, the lessons do not have to take place at the same time. Only the first and last meeting must happen simultaneously to enable real-time communication.

3.2 Student's background

The students have a range of skills available, some of which were prepared deliberately for this project. In language skills, it is vital that students know relevant web-related vocabulary and can communicate in English rather fluently. Above that, the students have had the chance to develop their electronic literacy and several (web-related) research skills: The pupils in all participating classrooms are familiar with computers, web2.0 sites and issues. They have had a wiki crash course in which positive and negative examples of wiki articles were analysed by the students, and guidelines on how to write a good article have been worked out. The pupils know how to cite, where and how to find relevant information (online), how to evaluate the trustworthiness of a source.

As digital natives¹ the pupils are used to communication in lack of physical presence, and they are also aware of Netiquette² and legal issues on the internet. In detail, this means that the students know how to behave appropriately in the digital world, i.e. they are aware of the fact that anything

1 A digital native is a person who has grown up with digital technology such as computers, the Internet and mobile phones. The counterpart is a digital immigrant who grew up without digital technology and adopted it later. (TheFreeDictionary.com)

2 Netiquette, a portmanteau of "network etiquette", is the convention on electronic forums (Usenet, mailing lists, live chat, and Internet forums) to facilitate efficient interaction and create a respectful atmosphere.

posted online will probably stay online forever, even against their will. The students know the basics about licensing and copying, and where to find copyleft material that is free to use.

It is also not the first time that the students work on collaborative tasks, but they never worked with students outside of the classroom before.

3.3 The project within the context of previous and subsequent teaching units

The project is part of a larger unit that deals with different types of texts and their effect on us. This unit refers to “Lernbereich 3: Texte und Themenbereiche” of the Saxon curriculum, in which several literary forms are evaluated. Students have already worked on short stories, poems, a novel and a drama. Subsequently, the students dealt with non-fictional text types such as reports and political speeches. Special emphasis was put on the meta-cognitive level, i.e. students were encouraged to reflect on the effect which the texts had on them, and how the text accomplishes these effects.

Now the pupils have the chance to get active and apply what they have learnt in previous lessons. Dealing with the new text type of advertisements requires them to utilize their research and investigation skills, to transfer their knowledge, and to incorporate their ability to reflect. Furthermore, the group work approach allows for content differentiation that is otherwise hard to implement in regular lessons.

The flat classroom project will form the finale of the text types unit and will be followed by a unit on intercultural studies with topics like “adolescence”, “education and work”, “arts and culture” where we will harness student’s intercultural knowledge and personal relations acquired in this project.

3.4 Analysis of the Topic: Advertising

As we live in a capitalist economy, the main aim of any company is to maximise profit. To achieve this, the company must convince people or institutions to buy their product. Besides sponsoring and public relations, this is realised through advertising:

“Advertising is a planned communication process between a company and potential consumers in which the company tries to influence knowledge, opinions, attitudes and behaviour about products, services, companies, brands, people or ideas.” (Siegert, 2010, p.28)

There are also broader definitions which include political and religious advertisement (which may be dealt with in the project), but I will restrict this analysis to economically motivated advertising.

After giving a brief overview of the scope of advertising today, I will come to describe how advertising works and what effects and strategies it incorporates.

Originally playing a small role in companies, advertising is now itself a huge economic sector. In 2007, 30.78 billion Euro have been spent on advertising in Germany which is 1.3% of the gross national product (ZAW-Zentralverband der Deutschen Werbewirtschaft). The amount of advertising expenditures is rising all over the world, the trend is constantly going up even in times of recession.

Now, what are the principles of advertising, and why are they effective? Any communication process consists of sender, recipient, channel, and message. Since messages can never be transmitted directly (i.e. from brain to brain), they must be encoded before sending and then decoded in order to be comprehensible to the recipient (Shannon, 1948). This approach is closely related to psychological theories of learning as information processing and as construction of knowledge. Before naming a few possible communication channels, I want to focus on encoding and decoding.

The problem of advertising is the following: advertising aims at affecting its recipients, but there is no formal obligation for the recipients to follow the advertisement message. This makes it necessary to apply psychological strategies of manipulation. A billboard reading “buy this product” will not be very successful in persuading the consumers into actually buying it. Instead, it is necessary to disguise and translate the marketing aims into advertising (sign) language. This encoding process is typically conducted by advertisement agencies who incorporate several advertising strategies to catch the attention and manipulate our desires, opinions, attitudes and behaviour. Most of these strategies incorporate reference to our basic instincts, in particular sex, children, animals, humour and fear which seem to be highly effective and are used regularly in advertising as a consequence. Especially the most well-known brands do not focus on promoting their particular products any more. Rather, the advertising revolves around the brand itself. In their advertisements the brand is charged with specific values, emotions and life-style elements to create a positive image or build trust in the label.

When a potential consumer recognises an advertisement message, he or she needs to decode it. This involves conscious and unconscious interpretation which is dependent on a number of factors like cultural background, environment, social setting and many others that are not in the control of the advertisement agency. As a result, adverts are prone to misinterpretation which can have a negative drawback on the image on the image of the company.

In between encoding and decoding there is the transportation of the message over one or more channels. There is probably no channel of communication that has not been used for advertising at

some point. However, mass media is mostly utilized today because of its low cost in relation to the scope of the potential audience. Mass communication is a unidirectional process in the form of regular advertisements or spots in publicly available media like newspapers and magazines, television, radio, advertising columns, billboards and advertising spaces on private and public transport means. A special case is formed by ambient-media – these are objects that can be found in everyday situations but which were not designed as a carrier of advertisements in the first place, such as telephone booths, toilet doors, the backside of tickets, napkins, sugar bags and matchboxes (Siegert, 2010, p.35).

Although mass communication entails low costs, it may be little effective in reaching a specific target group. This is why companies sometimes prefer individual one-to-one communication for advertisement purposes (Siegert, 2010). The so-called direct marketing is characterised by the possibility for the recipient to respond instantly. Examples for this include media sent to specific households via mail (where you can answer in writing to the given address of the company), promotions in the public space or personalised online advertisement like Google AdSense (where you can click and buy without further ado).

Another way of positioning a product is a mixture of the actual ad with editorial content of the utilised media – so-called hybrid forms. Although there are regulations on how an ad must be tagged in newspapers, TV etc., there are still many possibilities of neatly blending product placement with editorial content, usually including similar layout, fonts and corporate design elements. Sometimes even the editorial content focuses on products, e.g. the renowned German news broadcast “Tagesschau” had a feature on Apple’s “iPad” when it became available in Europe. A product can also “accidentally” appear in the background of the carrier media. The James Bond movies are a prominent example for this type of product placement where Omega Watches, BMW cars and VAIO laptops appear repeatedly with the Logos clearly visible.

Advertising is an ubiquitous phenomenon that has thoroughly pervaded our life-world. This has a number of negative consequences which are to be discussed in the following section³.

Firstly, there is rarely any area of public (and indeed private) life which is not invaded by some sort of advertising. Critics argue that complete commercialisation of public spaces is harmful to society. At least some places like schools should be completely free from advertising to shield children from exploitation and ensure healthy development (cf. “How Marketers Target Kids” by Media

³ This listing does not raise the claim to completeness. In fact I hope that the students find many more different points of criticism.

awareness network). Secondly, the strategies of psychological pressure for marketing purposes are heavily criticised for posing possible mental health risks. Thirdly, it is argued that advertising makes the carrier medium dependent and principles of free speech are infringed. Especially media that do not charge the consumer (e.g. private television networks) are fully dependent on advertising revenue which in fact prohibits free journalism.

4. Breakdown of the project plan

Work Project k	Stage	Lesson Title	Intended Teacher Activities	Expected Learner Activities	Types of Social Interac tion	Media	Remarks
	Preparation		<p>contact among teachers of different classes established (via email)</p> <p>register all teachers and students with the wiki, use a name corresponding with the pattern SCHOOL.(TEACHER?).FIRSTNAME.LASTNAMEINITIAL</p> <p>a teacher assigns four students from different schools to one of the teams (1-10) on the “student teams” page</p> <p>Teacher meeting</p> <p>0: Test video chat connection of classrooms, wiki up and running?</p>	Get a permission from their parents to participate in the project			
1		Presenting ourselves	<p>Give an outline of how the project will be organized (do not tell the topic yet!)</p> <p>Write questions on blackboard: How can we present our school/class in 3min? What questions do we have for the other</p>	<p>Think-pair-share.</p> <p>share:</p> <p>→ student facilitator collects ideas on blackboard</p> <p>→ with support of facilitator, class decides on content of presentation, team of presenters, team of pupils who will answer the questions of other classes, decide on questions for other classes + who sends them to other classrooms</p> <p>prepare and rehearse presentation</p>	Think-pair-share, class discussion & show of hands	Blackboard, task for think-pair-share on OHP/LCD-projector at all	topic of the project not known to students yet

			classes? Organize and time the phases of Think-pair-share (before share-phase: name a student facilitator) (train technical assistants)	students who don't participate in discussion/ preparation: crash course to become technical assistant (introduced to video chat and wiki administration)		times	
2	Introduction on	Introduction to the project	keynote address of one teacher for all participants (will be made available on the wiki)	listen	Teacher presentation	Live video chat (computer, microphone & speakers, projector)	
			(technical aid only)	classroom handshakes: each classroom gives 3min introduction to their school/class + answers questions they receive from other classrooms	Student presentation	Live video chat	
		Set-up of project	Explain & aid students in logging in to the wiki and finding their group	Log in to wiki (optional: state connection details + introduce yourself on your personal wiki page). Go to "student teams" page to find out what group you are in, read assigned task on the already existing wiki page of your group	Teacher presentation + individual student work		
			(technical aid only)	Student group handshakes: students use real-time means of communication (video chat if available, or voice chat / text chat) to introduce themselves and to discuss these questions: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 Have you worked with pupils from other countries before? 2 What do you expect from the project? 3 In your opinion, what is the worst thing that can happen? How could you avoid it happening? 4 How do you want to communicate during the project? (discussion page only, Wiki-pm, 	Collaborative/ individual student work	video chat if available, or voice chat / text chat	

				regular video chat meetings, social networks, Email, instant messaging, ...) 5 How do you want to work? Who does what & until when? (see deadlines on the page "timeline") Students must post a summary of the meeting on the discussion page of their group topic page (optional: post the video/audio/text link of the meeting) Students may begin research during the lesson if time permits			
			Teacher meeting 1: Any issues to discuss?				
3	Research & processing	Work on wiki article	(technical aid only, no help with / clarification of tasks)	Student groups work on their wiki articles	Collaborative/ individual student work	computers	
			Teacher meeting 2				
4	Reflection, processing	Reflection, Work on wiki article	(technical aid only)	Self-evaluation: every student has 10 minutes to reflect on the project and post answers to these questions on their personal page: 1 How is the project going? 2 What still needs to be done? 3 How is my group getting along? 4 What can I do to be a better group member? finish working on wiki article	Collaborative/ individual student work	computers	
			Teacher meeting 3 + awards for 3 best articles				
5	Meta-reflection	Preparation of final presentation	Time the phases of think-pair-share, nominate a facilitator (does not participate in work on presentation) (when pupils concentrate on language more	think-pair-share: What did the project mean to me, what did I learn? What was the hardest part? Would I do it again → why? how can we present the project to the school & our parents? What information is relevant/ should we include in the presentation? Sequence of topics? Prepare a 15min presentation on the project (in English). The following jobs need to be distributed: • 2 technical assistants (get laptop,	Collaborative/ individual student work	task for think-pair-share on OHP/ LCD-projector at all times	

			than on content: remind pupils that it is more important to make your point than to use perfect language – you will be presenting before Germans who won't notice most of the mistakes!)	projector, sound in the auditorium to work) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • at least 3 different presenters • pupils who create the slideshow • pupils who design a leaflet that summarizes the project • pupils who create & send out invitations to the presentation (invite not only your parents but other schools, the mayor, ...) The presentation will be next Thursday at 5p.m. in the auditorium!			
			Teacher meeting 4				
6	Prese ntatio n	Project presentation for everybody interested		final public presentation			Present ation is open to the public

For reasons of comprehensibility I will present a few pages of the wiki which are central to the project in the following sections.

4.1 Page “Instructions”

Welcome to the Flat Classroom Project on Advertising. This is an exciting and challenging project that will not only give you insights into advertisement techniques but also enhance your understanding of other cultures and improve your IT skills along the way.

In this project you will write a collaborative report using a wiki. You will edit the wiki and discuss the topic on the discussion tab of the page. Detailed information on your task can be found on the page of your group, see “Student teams”.

Wiki-specific

(Here go guidelines that have been worked out by students in previous wiki-editing crash course)

Give your sources in footnotes!

Review process: Constantly review your wiki page(s), correct spelling and grammar mistakes, insert necessary capitalisation, enhance textual organisation and visual layout, check if the links work properly. If you want to change the meaning, use the discussion page first!

After you've started doing research, you should also start writing and adding information onto the wiki page. Build your knowledge in parallel in your mind and on the wiki!

Keep content and discussion apart: you TALK about the page under discussion – you EDIT the page on the wiki page itself. After each day of work, students should leave a message on the discussion page about what they did and what they think needs to happen next – this makes work easier for the team members.

Getting help

You can get support from Teacher XY. You are responsible for your project, this means that you are responsible to ask for help if you experience problems!

4.2 Page “Student teams”

Here you see an overview of assigned group topics. If you don't know what team you are in please contact your teacher.

1. Overview: Explain what advertisement is, what forms there are, what functions it fulfils / what aims it can have (motivation – e.g. why do advertisement agencies distort reality?)
2. detailed analysis: a print ad
3. detailed analysis: a billboard ad
4. detailed analysis: a TV spot
5. detailed analysis: a radio ad
6. detailed analysis: an unconventional ad
7. ads on our way to school (problem: pupils from different classrooms) (make a personal map on google maps where you mark all public advertisements on your way to school + integrate images of the ads) Are there too many ads?
8. differences in advertising across counties (of participants)
9. pro advertisement/ contra advertisement:
10. What organisations criticise/fight ads and how? (advertising – what is it + your opinion?) for teams in the same classroom: prepare a discussion between a advertisement agency leader and an anti-ad activist

4.3 An example group topic page: “Analysis of a print ad”

Welcome to the flat classroom project on advertising. This is the page you will edit. First, post all names of group members at the bottom of the page. Then find an example of a print ad that you want to analyse. Use the discussion page of this article to discuss issues with your group. See the “instructions” page for information on the expected standard of wiki editing. If you have problems, go to the “help” page. If you are finished with your article ahead of time, go to the “digging deeper” page.

Note 1: All group members should contribute roughly equal shares which will be verified via the history of this article.

Note 2: All instructions in italics must be overwritten/deleted in the final version (you may want to print this page now for later reference).

Description

post a picture of the print ad here.

Describe the advertisement, use these questions as a guide: Where is the ad from? What is on the ad (pictures, drawings, colours, shapes, text)? How are the elements arranged? What is the ad for, what is the name of the agency that produced the ad? What senses does the ad affect?

Analysis

Now analyse the advertisement. You can use these questions as a guide:

How does the viewer know what the ad is for?

Effect

What is the intended reaction of the viewer? How does the ad work, e.g. what desires are triggered / how is a positive image created (children, animals, humour, sex)? Is it true what the ad says/promises?

Cultural background

Is it typical for the country the ad is from? Are there cultural references that people from other counties won't understand?

Personal opinion

Use sections for every individual student and indicate your names.

Do you like them? Why / why not? How does the ad make you feel? Do you think it is OK to use the specific trigger to enhance the image (e.g. is it OK to use

cute animals in advertisements for airlines)?

Citations

Group members

4.4 Page “Digging deeper”

If you are finished with your article ahead of time, you may want to digg a little deeper:

- find relevant, up-to-date information on advertisements in your country , like recent lawsuits, articles, etc. and post commented links on your wiki page
- find online sources that deal with the particular aspect of advertising of your group / the example ad that your group has chosen. What do other people say about it and how do they support their findings? How does it differ from your analysis?
- Check articles by other students for inspiration on what your page could be missing, (both this project and other projects: flatclassroomproject.org)
- browse the list of excellent Wikipedia articles at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Featured_articles to see and refer to http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Featured_article_criteria

5. Didactical/methodological considerations

5.1 Relevancy of the topic

Analysing and understanding the mechanisms of advertisement is central to becoming a responsible citizen in a democratic society. Not only because election slogans of all parties must be subject to criticism but also because you cannot make rational decisions on which product to buy or which service to use if you are manipulated easily.

Since children are particularly prone to manipulation and therefore preferably targeted by advertisement agencies, it is most important to make them aware and reflect on corporate manipulation.

5.2 Choice of media: Why wiki makes sense

Utilizing a wiki can be very rewarding in a classroom situation because of the following advantages:

Wikis reflect (online) information structure. While the students work on their articles they actively experience features of information on the internet: First, online resources are highly access-

ible. The wiki is independent of installed software and the operating system of the computer which makes it a democratic medium. Especially in education it is vital not to lock out users of free open source software. Moreover, educational wikis are less prone to digital censorship as enforced by countries like Saudi Arabia, Burma, China, North Korea, Cuba, Egypt, Iran, Uzbekistan, Syria, Tunisia, Turkmenistan, Vietnam and many others (Reporters Sans Frontières). As a result, the wiki can be accessed from every computer connected to the internet, by pupils, friends, parents and virtually anybody in the world.

Second, digital information is typically available in an instant. The wiki is immediately updated after every edit which is not only necessary for online collaboration but also highly motivating for the students. Together with the vast potential audience, one-click publishing on a wiki can indeed be a thrill to novices. Here, extrinsic motivation changes into (more effective) intrinsic motivation: Students want to “do it the right way” not because the teacher told them so, but because it is important to themselves. Self-monitoring is increased, and pupils are more likely to reflect on their language output because they want to write in a way that can be understood by their peers.

Third, information on the internet is highly dynamic – and so is the wiki: When browsing through the articles the students will notice that all the pages are constantly changing. Every student who has had a look at the “recent changes” page⁴ will be filled with excitement because of the number of edits including editor names and school. Showing this page to (unmotivated) students can also serve as an initial stimulus because some pupils find it is easier to start working when they see what others do at the moment. The transparency of the working process is one of the main reasons why I chose to work with a wiki.

There are also advantages for the teacher: Although a wiki is usually open to the public, the teacher retains control over who can join, edit or even see the wiki and its individual pages. This is not the case with other online publishing systems such as blogs or social networks where the teacher may lose grip.

Another advantage is easy student participation tracking. While it is usually hard and time-consuming to track work shares in regular group work, participation tracking is no problem with wikis. Every edit is saved for future reference and is always linked to the corresponding editor.

4 A summary of all changes made to a wiki in chronographic order.

5.3 Reasons for organisational decisions

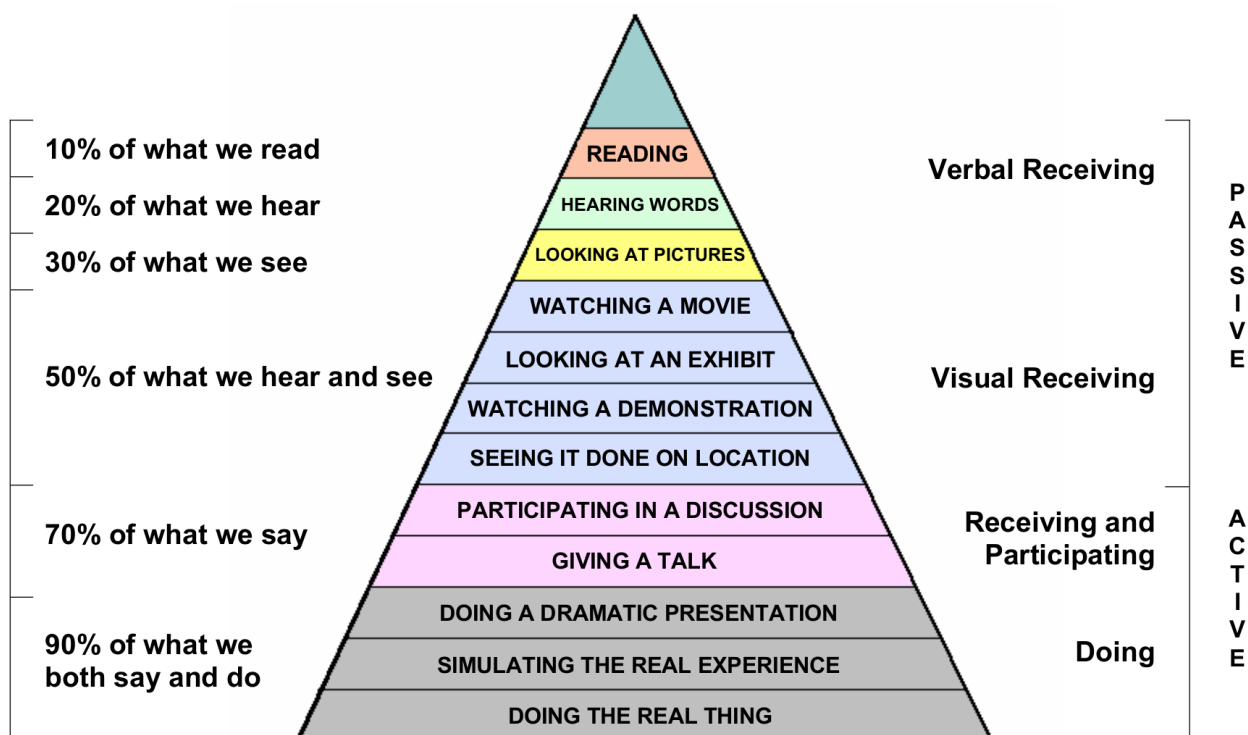
One of the main features of this project is that every student group works on a different topic. This differentiation is meant to create a positive working atmosphere where students are interested in each other's fields and developments. Effects of synergy are likely to occur, e.g. the students may be inspired by other pages and be encouraged to improve their own. It must be pointed out that differentiation happens only in regard to content, not according to performance. Because of the design of the wiki, higher-performing students can still unveil their potential (i.e. are not held back by lower-performing students) while lower-performing students can benefit from studying how higher-performing students achieve their goals. The high level of differentiation accomplished in this project can rarely be found in regular classrooms and is therefore a valuable supplement for day to day teaching.

Another vital feature is the repeated variation of forms of social interaction. This is inspired by the SOL-Sandwich (Herold, Landherr: 2004, S.9.). Here, "SOL" stands for self-organized learning, but I have experienced this principle to be useful in any teaching context. In short, it proposes frequent rotation of individual, co-operative and instructional/presentational phases. Individual phases in this project include "think" of think-pair-share, research on the group topic, personal reflection, and partly editing of the wiki article. Co-operative phases are the "pair" of think-pair-share, preparing the presentations, group communication and decision making, and also editing the wiki article. The instructional/presentational phases are characterised by a clear distinction of presenter and audience, while the presenter can be the teacher but also a student(-team). These phases are found in the beginning of the project (instruction about the task) and in the end (presentation), but also in the beginning and the end of every single lesson to give students a red thread to follow. Sometimes it may be even necessary to insert such a phase in the middle of the lesson, e.g. when a certain problem occurs repeatedly the teacher must call for the attention of all students to explain how to avoid the problem.

In the penultimate session students are asked to reflect on their work and communication processes. This phase is the most important of the project because it enables students to find out for themselves what they have actually learned. Reflection makes it possible for the students to become aware of their learning/problem-solving strategies and brings about the opportunity to use these strategies consciously and deliberately next time, potentially increasing learner autonomy.

Present-day children are digital natives: they connect, share and communicate online on a daily basis. Therefore it is the responsibility of the school to take up and expand this background of electronic literacy towards online cooperation. This may help the students in future work situations where they have to deal with similar situations, e.g. when they are expected to interact, collaborate or negotiate with strangers from other cultural backgrounds. Since wikis are nowadays commonly used in the workplace for project and knowledge management, experience in wiki structure and editing can be helpful.

We must bear in mind that simply reading about electronic literacy, project management and intercultural communication is ineffective for memorising the corresponding factual and procedural knowledge. Rather, the students must have their own experience by “doing the real thing” in an authentic context. This claim is supported by the Cone of Learning (see graphic below) which was developed by Edgar Dale (1946). The Cone of Learning states that the degree of remembrance depends on the degree of involvement in the task. In other words, the more active one gets, the more is kept in mind. The flat classroom project on advertisement tries to utilize this mechanism to create a valuable experience for the pupils.



Edgar Dale, *Audio-Visual Methods in Teaching* (3rd Edition). Holt, Rinehart, and Winston (1969).

5.3.1 Collaboration

The project is set in a *Computer-Supported Collaborative Learning environment* which is can be defined as follows:

“CSCL environments provide shared workspaces where students carry out learning activities using tools for learning object manipulation, discussion and coordination” (M. Ortega et al. 2009)

However, it must be pointed out that students do not necessarily collaborate even if they have the same learning targets and shared workspaces. To examine this phenomenon I want to refer to the theory of social interdependence which was developed by Morton Deutsch and later extended by Johnson & Johnson. In short, they hypothesise that actions of individual group members are determined by the type of dependency within the group (Deutsch, 1962; Johnson & Johnson, 1989). There are three types of dependency: positive, negative and no interdependence. In this project, students will experience positive interdependence, i.e. the members of the group can only succeed if all other group members succeed as well. In contrast, negative interdependence means that an individual can only succeed if other group members fail. Positive interdependence is achieved by demanding the students to contribute roughly equal shares to the wiki article which can be verified by the amount and scope of edits. According to the theory of social interdependence, this task design will make the students help each other. Note that some supposedly collaborative tasks lack interdependence at all: When the task can be solved by the individual students without any need for communication within the group, they will work independent of each other. This is exactly the opposite of collaboration and manifests itself in the classroom as students groups sitting together but working individually.

Furthermore, online collaboration relies on a mixture of both modes of computer-mediated communication: synchronous and asynchronous (Massler, 2005). In this project the asynchronous part is played by the wiki and the teacher-only mailing list, possibly also by student Email communication. Synchronous modes are implemented as well, but only for instructional/presentational purposes and where immediate response is necessary: In the establishing phase, video conferencing is used as an initial social impulse to arouse pupils' curiosity. Another conference is set for the first encounter of the group members where they get to know each other and sort out their working principles.

5.3.2 Communication

Since this is a project in a foreign language for all participants, promotion of communication is vital to improvement in language competence. Ideally, each team consists of 4 pupils from different schools around the globe, which forces them to communicate in English because their mother tongues are mutually exclusive. This creates real-world communicative situations across different cultures which form a significant precondition for student's progress in language and intercultural communicative competence.

Intensive peer communication has several advantages over sole communication with the teacher. Even if the teacher is a native speaker, he/she is *not* an authentic audience for the students because of the difference in age and status. The teacher has the obligation to improve their student's language skills, therefore he/she will focus on error correction rather than on achieving communicative success (Massler, 2005). In contrast, the communicative situation among peers is likely to be open and egalitarian so that uninhibited behaviour of the students can be expected. Some peers may give immediate corrective feedback which is much more likely to be accepted by the student (as opposed to teacher feedback). It has been pointed out by Pelettieri (2000) and Ying et. al. (2004) that grammatical improvement is not bound to oral communication but can be achieved through online chatting as well.

5.3.3 Intercultural communicative competence

Another key aim of the project is to provide students with the opportunity to develop their intercultural communicative competence (ICC) which I will now discuss in greater detail. According to Byram (1997), ICC consists of the following parts:

1. Knowledge: of social groups and their products and practices in one's own and one's interlocutor's country, and the general processes of societal and individual interaction
2. Skills of interpreting and relating: ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to documents or events from one's own.
3. Skills of discovery and interaction: ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices and the ability to operate knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction.
4. Attitudes: curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own.
5. Critical cultural awareness/political education: an ability to evaluate, critically and on the basis

of explicit criteria, perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures and countries .

As I already pointed out, student groups are ideally made up of 4 students from different countries. This enables them to share different cultural perspectives on the topic of advertisement and present these differences in their wiki article, thereby acquiring and processing intercultural knowledge. In order to present their findings in the wiki appropriately, the students must develop skills of interpreting and relating cultural phenomena. In a joint effort the students will also evaluate critically the perspectives, practices and products in the field of advertisement in regard to the the respective cultural background. The direct encounter with representatives from other cultures and the construction of a common product may also cultivate students' attitudes of intercultural openness and curiosity. Along the way, students might encounter cultural differences in their attitudes towards project management – meta-reflection on these experiences is encouraged in the preparation of the final presentation.

5.3.4 Assessment

There will be no grades but awards for the 3 best articles. The reason is that this project wants the students to focus on content and their experience rather than on their position in the ranking – they should begin to draw satisfaction from the product, not from the grade. It is nevertheless important to reward the best work in order to keep the high-performing students motivated so that they will put equal effort in future projects. In addition, problems arising from incompatible grading systems of the participating countries can be avoided and teachers have more time to support their students. Note that individual assessment was omitted deliberately because positive interdependence could not be sustained otherwise.

The criteria for assessment will be made public on the wiki and include:

- Did the students have roughly equal shares in editing? Did all students participate on the discussion page? Did the group actually collaborate (rather than just do their part and not care about the others)?
- Is the article visually appealing (formatting, layout, pictures & other media)?
- Is the article well organised textually (structure of headings, red thread, textual coherence)?
- Are the included links relevant, do they refer to the supposed information? Are all sources stated properly (plagiarism)?
- Does the language meet standards of style, spelling, grammar, punctuation?

- Was the assignment completed?

(cf. Davis, 2007)

6. Conclusion

There are still many ways in which the project could be improved. For example, all articles could undergo a phase of peer review in the tradition of Wikipedia. This would enhance the student's experience of building a common body of knowledge but would make it more difficult to assess since the final product would be the result of a common effort of all participants. Alternatively, student group articles could be evaluated by a student committee or through a rotation system. This would further increase pupils' ability for meta-reflection. An easy way of implementing this element would be an additional student award.

It may not always be possible to have groups with all participants coming from a separate classroom. In this case one could set tasks that require the students to interact locally such as “document all ads on your way to school” or “prepare a fictional discussion between a advertisement agency leader and an anti-ad activist.”

Last but not least there is the potential of (online) participation of people outside the school context. Parents, scholars, politicians and many others could be integrated into the Flat Classroom project easily. As a result, a classroom would not only connect to other classrooms but to the whole world, creating a true intercultural learner experience.

But even if the project is conducted as proposed, it will have valuable effects on the pupils: They will improve their language skills, their intercultural communicative competence, their electronic literacy and begin to cultivate a sense of world-citizenship in the 21st century.

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8. Declaration

I herewith declare that I have prepared this paper on my own, using only the sources mentioned. Ideas taken, directly or indirectly, from other sources (including the Internet), are identified as such.

Dresden,
